

Fair Oaks Farms in Fair Oaks, Indiana, is a working dairy farm that has become one of Northern Indiana's top tourist attractions.



THE DAIRY INDUSTRY

# GETTING UP-CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH YOUR MILKSHAKE

FAIR OAKS FARMS GROWS A WORKING DAIRY FARM INTO A BIG AGRITOURISM DESTINATION.

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In an era in which only 1 percent of the U.S. population works in production agriculture, people can pretty quickly lose touch with what it takes to put food on their table.

So the founders of Fair Oaks Farms—a Jasper County REMC member that opened in 1999 as a production dairy farm—came up with an ingenious idea: Why not invite the public and give them an opportunity to get up-close and personal with their food?

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Gary Corbett is Fair Oaks' CEO and one of its founders. "A lot of our visitors have seen lions, tigers, and bears but never cows and pigs," Corbett said. "Now we're bringing in more than a half-million people each year, giving them context for where that gallon of milk or pork chop comes from."

Visitors can tour the farm's milking facility, stables, and birthing center, and they can get a taste of its meat and dairy products in the Farmhouse Restaurant, market and bakery, and gift shop. But what might

surprise them most is Fair Oaks Farms' entrepreneurial spirit, clearly displayed by its commitment to sustainability.

How? By "making rocket science of manure management"; that is, processing the phosphorus in manure for use as fertilizer, and the methane to make electricity and compressed natural gas (CNG) that powers one of the largest fleets of CNG delivery trucks in the country. "It means a 90 percent reduction in our carbon footprint and brings a cost savings of about \$2 per gallon," Corbett said.

"And a side benefit, Cummins—which is right here in Indiana—is the biggest producer of CNG engines right now."

That kind of ingenuity has led Fair Oaks Farms to keep growing. Expect a hog education facility to open soon, and a crop education center in early spring. There's a craft center on the horizon, a John Deere equipment museum, a new lunch facility for the 75,000 school and camp kids who come through each year, and an egg-laying facility. Probably a convention center and inn. Certainly a concert facility.

Still, the animals are the main attraction. "We didn't think that agriculture could keep its attitude that the world ends at the farm gate, and we wanted to develop a new paradigm as best we could," Corbett said.

Mission accomplished. Fair Oaks Farms is empowering visitors to understand how food gets from rural America to all kinds of dinner tables in all kinds of households across the nation and around the world. It's also an economic development success story—proof that all kinds of big dreams and great ideas can thrive here—a deliberately different approach to business that's right at home on Jasper County REMC's lines.

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**Learn how Wabash Valley Power uses energy efficiency rebates to support agribusiness. Contact Brian Anderson, Director of Economic Development, at [b\\_anderson@wvpa.com](mailto:b_anderson@wvpa.com) or 317-409-9806.**

